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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001166

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/PDPA DALTON, MITCHELL AND SIMS AND AF/S RAYNOR

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION MASS ACTION IN ZIM; HARARE

11. Weekend editorials concentrated on the five-day anti-government protests, called by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), that completely shutdown commerce and industry in the country from June 2 through 6, 2003. Editorial excerpts follow:
12. Under headline "ZANU-PF digging its own grave" the independent daily "The Daily News" (06/09) comments:

"Faced with glaring evidence of the people of Zimbabwe's dissatisfaction with the government, President Robert Mugabe is maintaining a belligerent attitude, threatening the opposition and participants in last week's mass action with retribution. . . It must be clear even to the ruling ZANU-PF that such heavy-handedness. . . would again send the wrong signals to local and foreign investors. . . We fully appreciate the government's need to show that it is still in charge following a mass action that humiliatingly demonstrated that force alone is keeping the ruling party in power. But we would urge prudence in the aftermath of last week's protests, for the good of the nation and indeed for the government's own good. . . The government's iron-fisted response to the mass action and a violent campaign of retribution in the next few weeks will only harden the people's hearts against the ruling party, which is clearly playing into the hands of the opposition's hands. If ZANU-PF continues to display its lack of maturity, it will ultimately dig its own grave. . . ."
13. Under headline "Tsvangira's fate: No one above the law" the government-controlled daily "The Herald" (06/09) comments:

". . . The arrest of MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai for making treasonous statements will reassure Zimbabweans that the justice system is alive and well in the country and the police will not be intimidated by anyone from carrying out its constitutional mandate. . . The AG (Attorney-General) and police should be commended for their boldness in holding Tsvangirai accountable for his actions. Let the courts decide whether his actions have been lawful or not. . . The arrest of Tsvangirai. . . is a sobering development and a stark reminder that the law in Zimbabwe is not like a cobweb, which may catch small flies but will let wasps and hornets break through. No one is above the law."
14. Under headline "Admit you are finished" the independent weekly "The Daily News on Sunday" (06/08) comments:

". . . Still, from the intensity of the panic with which the government reacted to the mass action. . . one thing is clear: Mugabe must admit that politically he is finished. No longer can he stand up and brazenly claim that the people are behind him. No. The people are not behind him any more. They are not even frightened of him or his savage security machinery any more. They are thoroughly fed up with his misrule and are praying the he will exit the scene while he can still do it with a modicum of dignity and self-respect. If Mugabe and ZANU-PF dismiss the mass action as a flush in the pan and hope that people will start to sing Mugabe's and ZANU-PF's praises this week, then the country is headed for a very long period of instability. If Mugabe does not acknowledge that only through a sincere dialogue with the MDC can the country return to a semblance of the political and economic normalcy before 2000, then he is throwing down the gauntlet and daring the people: what else can you do to me? The answer to that defiance may be to ghastly to contemplate:"
15. Under headline "Confront the real issues Mr. Mugabe: The real threat to your power base Mr. President is not Tsvangirai but the people of Zimbabwe" the independent weekly "The Standard" (06/08) comments:

". . .As long as the country's economy remains in intensive care, your own position will remain vulnerable. This is the crux of the matter. You can delude yourself by dismissing the protests as a flop but is this the real issue? The real issue, Mr. President, is that the people of Zimbabwe are completely dissatisfied and disillusioned with the state of affairs in the country. Tsvangirai has won the hearts and minds of the Zimbabweans because of this dissatisfaction and disillusionment - pure and simple. . .President Mugabe and the ruling party must neither underrate the mood of the people or their power to change things. As long as Zimbabweans continue to suffer the way they are doing, the challenge and threat to the President's power base remains. And it will be arrogant and nave in the extreme for the government and its media to gloat that they have scored an immense propaganda victory over Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC. . . ."

16. Under headline "Dialogue must resume" the pro-government weekly the "Sunday Mirror" (06/08) comments:

". . .While the nation is evidently politically polarized, it is an understatement to say the Zimbabweans are united in their hope for a swift improvement in the political and economic condition they find their country in. . .These facts in themselves create an adequate basis for engagement between the two parties (ZANU-PF and MDC). Any further procrastination on this fundamental issue is definitely not in the national interest. For, the damage to the already tottering economy and the increasingly violent political culture that is emerging in this country do not bode well for the nation."

17. Under headline "Corporates supping with the devil" the government-controlled weekly "The Sunday Mail" (06/08) comments:

". . .It is clear that the week-long stayaway was successful in terms of business shutdown and not mass action or demonstrations. The question that then comes to mind is why business chose to become so partisan in an environment where there are two contesting political forces. What they did amounted to advocating a violent overthrow of a government that they tomorrow will be expecting to work with and calling on to create an environment in which they can prosper. This is a sign of treacherous naivet that will only result in a souring of relations with the very political force that controls their destiny. . . ."

18. Under headline "Tsvangirai loses legitimacy to lead party" the government-controlled daily "The Herald" (06/07) comments:

"MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai has lost all legitimacy to lead the opposition party, having failed to deliver on all political promises he made to his supporters over the past three years. . .Tsvangirai can give all the explanation he wants to justify why no one seriously observed his call for mass marches, but the bottom line is that he failed to unseat the government of President Mugabe. . . ."